

Message Text

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SUBJECT: AWOLOWO ON NIGERIAN CENSUS

REF: LAGOS 6414

SUMMARY: IN SPEECH ON JULY 6 (REPORTED REFTTEL), CHIEF AWOLOWO CALLED UPON FMG TO SCRAP ENTIRE 1973 CENSUS. MAIN OBJECTIVE OF SPEECH WAS PROBABLY PART OF CONTINUING CAMPAIGN TO MAINTAIN HIMSELF IN PUBLIC EYE, BUT UNDER-NEATH RHETORIC AWOLOWO DELIVERED WARNING TO FMG: FINAL CENSUS FIGURES MUST BE POLITICALLY "ACCEPTABLE" -- I.E. MUST RESTORE NORTH/SOUTH RATIO ESTABLISHED BY 1963 CENSUS -- OR THERE WILL BE TROUBLE AHEAD. WHILE FMG UNDOUBTEDLY REALIZES POTENTIAL THREAT TO UNITY CONTAINED IN YORUBA UNHAPPINESS WITH PROVISIONAL RESULTS, IT EILL BE DIFFICULT FOR GOVERNMENT TO HEED AWOLOWO' WARNING. PERHAPS MOST LIEKLY MOVE WILL BE FOR FMG TO SEEK COMPROMISE FINAL FIGURES COMBINING SOME DEGREE TECHNICAL ACCURACY WITH SOME DEGREE POLITICAL ACCEPTABILITY. AS LONG AS MILITARY REMAIN UNITED, FMG CAN PROBABLY MANAGE ANY DIFFICULTIES CAUSED BY CENSUS; REAL CRUNCH WILL OCCUR

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WHEN (AND IF) CIVILIAN REGIME IS RESTORED. END SUMMARY

1. AFTER INITIAL PERIOD OF QUIET FOLLOWING RELEASE OF PROVISIONAL CENSUS FIGURES MAY 31, PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF YORUBA UNHAPPINESS HAS BEEN RISING OVER PAST SIX WEEKS (IBADAN 251). DURING HIS CONVOCATION SPEECH AT UNIFE (REFTTEL), HOWEVER, AWOLOWO BECAME FIRST MAJOR YORUBA FIGURE TO SPEAK OUT, AND HIS TOTAL REJECTION OF CENSUS AND DEMAND THAT IT BE SCRAPPED GO BEYOND ANYTHING SEEN YET. WHILE SKETCH EDITORIAL CALLING AWOLOWO DEMAND PREMATURE AND IMPRACTICAL IS DOUBTLESS RIGHT, IT VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT MOST YORUBAS PRIVATELY WOULD, AT THIS POINT, WELCOME RETURN TO 1963 CENSUS FIGURES -- DESPITE ORIGINAL YORUBA DISPLEASURE WITH THOSE TOTALS.

2. AWOLOWO, LIKE MANY OTHER OLD AND WOULD-BE POLITICIANS, HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN RECENT DAYS IN MAINTAINING HIMSELF IN PUBLIC EYE (LAGOS A-271 OF DECEMBER 6, 1973). TO LARGE EXTENT THIS SPEECH IS PART OF THAT CAMPAIGN, AND IT DEMONSTRATED HIS WILLINGNESS TO PLAY UPON DEEP YORUBA FEARS OF NORTHERN DOMINATION AND TO DISCREDIT GOWON BY NAME IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL. BUT EVEN GRANTING THIS DESIRE AS HIS MAIN OBJECTIVE, UNDERNEATH RHETORIC OF IMPRACTICAL SCHEMES AND UNREALISTIC DEMANDS, AWOLOWO DID UTILIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO DELIVER WARNING TO FMG: IF FINAL CENSUS FIGURES ARE NOT "POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE" -- I.E., DO NOT RESTORE NORTH/SOUTH BALANCE ESTABLISHED BY 1963 CENSUS -- THERE WILL BE SERIOUS TROUBLE AHEAD.

3. FMG UNDOUBTEDLY REALIZES POTENTIAL THREAT TO UNITY CONTAINED IN YORUBA UNHAPPINESS WITH PROVISIONAL CENSUS RESULTS. STILL, IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR GOVERNMENT TO HEED AWOLOWO'S WARNING. WHILE NORTH WOULD PROBABLY BE WILLING TO ACCEPT SOME REDUCTION OF ITS SHARE OF OVERALL NIGERIAN POPULATION IN INTERESTS OF NATIONAL UNITY (ESPECIALLY AS POST-ENUMERATION SURVEY WILL LIKELY CLIP FEW MILLION NORTHERNERS FROM PROVISIONAL COUNT ANYWAY), AND COMMISSIONER FIKA'S COMMENTS INDICATE, IT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY REJECT RETURN TO NORTH/SOUTH RATIO ENVISIONED BY AWOLOWO. IN ADDITION FMG PRIDES ITSELF ON ITS PAST RECORD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ABILITY "TO DELIVER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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GOODS" (LAGOS A-65), AND WOULD HESITATE ENDANGERING THIS RECORD IN FUTURE BY ADOPTING BADLY INACCURATE "ACCEPTABLE" CENSUS FIGURES.

4. ONE IMPORTANT CIVILIAN NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL PRIVATELY EXPRESSED BELIEF THAT SMC WOULD AVOID CENSUS PROBLEMS BY ACCEPTING AND THEN SIMPLY IGNORING FINAL FIGURES WHEN MAKING POLICY DETERMINATIONS; A SECOND PUBLICLY SUGGESTED THAT REVENUE ALLOCATION AND PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION NOT BE BASED ON 1973 CENSUS

FIGURES. IN SOME INSTANCES, SUCH AS QUESTION OF CREATION OF NEW STATES (LAGOS A-77), THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT BE ABLE TO DISREGARD CENSUS RESULTS. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO REVENUE ALLOCATION, REPRESENTATION IN EVENTUAL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT, PLANNING FOR UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION OR SIMILAR AREAS, ACCURATE POPULATION FIGURES ARE MORE ESSENTIAL AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW USE OF OR REFERENCE TO CENSUS TOTALS CAN BE AVOIDED. AND EVEN IF FMG COULD DISREGARD THEM, LATER CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT PROBABLY COULD NOT. PERHAPS MORE LIKELY MOVE -- AND ONE TYPICAL OF NORMAL SMC MODUS OPERANDI -- WOULD BE FOR FMG TO SEEK COMPROMISE FINAL FIGURES COMBINING SOME DEGREE OF TECHNICAL ACCURACY AND SOME DEGREE OF POLITICAL ACCEPTABILITY TO BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH; AND, IN FACT, RECENT CONVERSATION BETWEEN EMBOFF AND NIGERIAN DEPUTY CHIEF CENSUS OFFICER LEFT IMPRESSION CONFIRMING THIS VIEW. GOVERNMENT WOULD CONSIDER ANY RESULTING INTERNATIONAL SCEPTICISM OF CENSUS TOTALS SMALL PRICE TO PAY TO END DOMESTIC THREAT OF DISUNITY. WHETHER FMG CAN SUCCEED IN REASONABLY SATISFYING ALL PARTIES AND ALL REQUIREMENTS, OF COURSE, REMAINS TO BE SEEN. IN ANY CASE, AS LONG AS MILITARY STAY IN POWER AND RETAIN UNITED FRONT, TROUBLES CAUSED BY CENSUS WILL PROBABLY BE MANAGEABLE -- ALTHOUGH EXISTENCE OF DISORDER COULD BE USED AS PRETEXT TO EXTEND MILITARY RULE. REAL CRUNCH WILL COME WHEN (AND IF) CIVILIAN REGIME IS RESTORED.

5. UNLIKELY CONTENT OF SPEECH TOOK FMG BY SURPRISE SINCE COPIES WERE AVAILABLE AT LEAST ONE DAY IN ADVANCE. REPORTEDLY GOVERNMENT HAD PREVENTED AWOLOWO AIRING HIS VIEWS ON EARLIER OCCASION, AND, IF TRUE, IT IS UNCERTAIN WHY IT TOLERATED HIS DOING SO AT THIS TIME. GOWON CAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HARDLY BE PLEASED WITH AWOLOWO'S IMPLICATION THAT HE MUST BE EITHER FOOL OR LIAR FOR PRAISING THOROUGHNESS OF "APPALLING HEADCOUNT;" BUT, GIVEN HIS NATIONAL STATURE, AWOLOWO WILL PROBABLY SUFFER NO MORE THAN FEW TONGUE LASHINGS FOR HIS "PREMATURE AND DISRUPTIVE" STATEMENTS. REINHARDT

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